

RECREATIONAL FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

Progress Report to Congress
Fiscal Year 2003

Submitted by the

U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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Abbreviations

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
Council	The Recreational Fee Leadership Council
Departments	Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture
DOI	Department of the Interior
Fee Demo	Recreational Fee Demonstration Program
FS	USDA Forest Service
FY	Fiscal Year
FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
NCA	National Conservation Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHP	National Historic Park
NHS	National Historic Site
NM	National Monument
NP	National Park
NPS	National Park Service
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
P.L.	Public Law
S.	Senate Bill
SRP	Special Recreation Permit
U.S.	United States
USA	United States of America
U.S.C.	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDA FS	United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service

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Recreational Fee Demonstration Program Annual Report to Congress

Executive Summary

Under the Recreational Fee Demonstration (Fee Demo) program, Congress authorized the Department of the Interior's National Park Service (NPS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA FS) to implement and test new fees across the spectrum of recreation sites they manage. The Departments are authorized to retain all of the revenues from the Fee Demo Program, of which at least 80 percent must be spent at the sites where the fees were collected. These revenues continue to provide on-the-ground improvements at recreation sites managed by the Departments.

Beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2002, the Congressionally mandated limit of 100 demonstration sites was lifted. The NPS shifted all of its remaining recreational fee sites into the Fee Demo Program increasing the number of Fee Demo projects from 100 to 236. The other land management agencies made few changes in the number of participating sites. As of September 30, 2003, there were 109 FWS projects, 187 BLM projects, and 105 USDA FS projects.

Congress most recently extended the Fee Demo program through December 31, 2005, with the revenues collected available through FY 2008, in the FY 2004 Interior Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-108).

The FY 1998 Interior Appropriations Act (P.L. 105-163) required the participating Federal land management agencies to prepare a joint report to Congress each year of the Fee Demo Program.¹ This report details aggregate and site-specific figures for visitation, revenue, obligations, and cost of collection as well as agency specific explanations of data trends, general program updates, and a number of example project examples. This is the seventh joint report to Congress.

Aggregate visitation to recreation sites participating in the Fee Demo Program continues to be unaffected in any significant way by fees. (see Figure 1, page 7 and Table 1, page 8).

- Total visitation to fee and non-fee sites has remained relatively constant at about 360 million.

The Fee Demo Program provides an important source of supplemental revenue to meet the needs of recreation sites for the Departments of Interior and Agriculture (see Figure 2, page 9 and Table 2, page 10).

- Total Fee Demo revenue in FY 2003 was \$177 million, compared to total revenue of \$176 million in FY 2002.

¹The Annual Reports to Congress for FY 1997-2002 and the April 2002 Interim Evaluation Report are available at: <http://www.doi.gov/nrl/Recfees/RECFEESHOME.html>.

- Fee Demo revenues increased from \$8.7 million in FY 2002 to \$10.3 million in FY 2003 for the BLM; FWS Fee Demo revenue increased from \$3.6 million in FY 2002 to \$3.8 million in FY 2003; and USDA FS Fee Demo revenues increased from \$37.7 million in FY 2002 to \$38.8 million in FY 2003.
- NPS Fee Demo revenue decreased from \$125.7 million in FY 2002 to \$123.5 million in FY 2003.

The average cost of collection for the agencies over the FY 2000-FY 2003 period has remained roughly constant at about 20 percent of gross fee revenue (including revenue from the National Parks Pass and transportation fees) (see Figure 3, page 11 and Table 3, page 12).

- The cost of collection for NPS remained constant at about 22 percent (including revenue from the National Parks Pass and National Parks transportation system), the cost for FWS decreased from 19.3 percent in FY 2002 to 13.9 percent in FY 2003; the cost for BLM decreased from 22.3 percent in FY 2002 to 18.6 percent in FY 2003; and the cost for the USDA FS decreased from 16.3 percent in FY 2002 to 14.1 percent in FY 2003.
- The NPS, the FWS, and the BLM have all adopted similar guidelines on what constitutes collection costs. These guidelines should result in greater standardization of the treatment and identification of collection costs across the Interior bureaus. The implementation of these guidelines is at least partially responsible for the reduction in FWS and BLM collection costs in FY 2003.
- An important lesson learned is that fee managers need to continually monitor fee collection costs to ensure that these costs are tracked and accounted for properly.

Fee Demo revenues are an important source of funding to address deferred maintenance needs and provide visitor services (see Table 4, page 14; Figure 4, page 13; and Tables 5-8, pages 15-18).

- In FY 2003, the Departments obligated a total of \$192 million for a variety of projects designed primarily to address backlog maintenance needs, improve visitor services, meet outstanding health and safety needs, and protect and preserve resources.
- The Interior agencies obligated a total of about \$155 million.
- The USDA FS obligated a total of about \$36.8 million in FY 2003.
- Of the total FY 2003 obligations, fifty-three percent was for maintenance (deferred and routine) projects; 12 percent for projects to improve visitor services; and 11 percent for resource protection projects.
- Total unobligated balances declined from \$295.8 million in FY 2002 to \$282.8 million in FY 2003, and the Departments have taken steps to ensure that this trend is maintained.
- The NPS now requires all parks to develop specific spending plans. Unobligated balances are expected to decline substantially in the coming years as large projects designed to improve and upgrade recreation facilities enter the construction phase.

The Departments have moved to clarify and expand pass benefits.

- The Departments have expanded and clarified the benefits of the Golden Passes to include accepting the Golden Eagle at 1,500 additional USDA FS sites. The previous

pass policy at those sites was confusing; the Golden Eagle Passport was not accepted, Golden Age and Access Passports were given a 50 percent discount, while a regional pass, the Northwest Forest Pass, was accepted in full.

- The NPS now accepts passes at a majority of its fee sites, including six sites that previously had charged use fees for the primary attraction. In addition, the NPS is evaluating whether passes could be accepted at an additional 30 sites that currently do not accept passes for the primary attraction. BLM has evaluated all of its sites and is now accepting the Golden Eagle Pass at 12 additional sites.

Interagency coordination has continued in a number of critical areas.

- Fee-free day. The Departments coordinated in the selection of Public Lands Day as a common fee-free day in FY 2003. It is expected that this will continue to be the common fee-free day in future years. The Departments are continuing to work on mechanisms to reward members of the public that volunteer on Public Lands Day and throughout the year.
- Common reservation system. In FY 2003, the Departments continued their efforts to develop a single reservation system, in preparation for issuing a new contract to develop this system in FY 2004. The eventual goal is a single reservation system that will allow visitors to make reservations for appropriate NPS, USDA FS, BLM, FWS, Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation sites. The new system will replace the existing separate reservation systems.
- Washington and Oregon Recreation Pass. During FY 2003 state and federal agencies worked cooperatively to develop an annual multi-agency day-use recreation pass for use in the Pacific Northwest. Sales of this pass began in April 2004. The pass will be accepted at many public day-use fee areas in Oregon and Washington. Participating agencies include the USDA FS, NPS, the BLM, the Oregon Parks & Recreation Department, the Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission, the Corps of Engineers, and the FWS. Revenues will be used to operate and maintain key recreation facilities and services. The pass will sell for \$85, which includes the Golden Eagle Passport for \$65 and the Washington and Oregon Recreation Pass Upgrade for \$20.

The projects accomplished with Fee Demo revenues are numerous and diverse and include partnerships with states and gateway communities that promote tourism and result in better service for visitors (see Tables 5-8, pages 15-18).

The following projects are examples of the many FY 2003 accomplishments that were made possible by revenues generated by the Fee Demo Program:

- Fee revenues were used to fund upkeep, improvements, and program needs for the visitor center at the National Elk Refuge and the Jackson Hole and Greater Yellowstone Interagency Visitor Center. The centers are staffed with representatives of seven partner agencies: FWS, NPS, USDS FS, the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, the Grand Teton Natural History Association, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. The partner agencies provide a wide range of exhibits and interpretive programs for the over 300,000 annual visitors.

- Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) used Fee Demo revenues to make improvements to its waterfowl check station used during the hunting season. The refuge cooperated with the Telephone Pioneers of America, a non-profit volunteer group, to build and install the accessible ramp leading to the check station. Fee monies also paid for the construction of a new roof over the deck and for refinishing the interior floors of the check station.
- In partnership with the NPS, the Public Land Corps matched \$4 million in Fee Demo revenue with labor from its youth work partners to complete 223 projects focused primarily on deferred maintenance.
- The main sewer line at Bandelier National Monument was rehabilitated to prevent water pollution. Failure to correct the sewer line problems could have resulted in closure of all the visitor use facilities by the New Mexico State Water Quality Division.
- Haleakala National Park replaced the House of the Sun Visitor Center comfort station and water/sewer systems because they did not meet State of Hawaii health and safety regulations. The new wastewater system, water system and comfort station have reduced maintenance by eliminating water hauling.
- Fee Demo revenues helped pay for rehabilitating the parking lot and restrooms at the Panoramic Point day-use area at Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park. Additional amenities were also installed, including a split rail fence around the perimeter to establish foot traffic patterns, replacement of deteriorated bear-proof trashcans and food storage containers, and the addition of recycling bins.
- Fee Demo revenues helped to fund the REDStart fish hatchery on the FWS's J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge by providing tanks and filtration equipment to farm mosquito larvae-eating fish. The REDStart program is a partnership with Lee County Seagrass, Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation Marine Laboratory, Mote Marine Lab, South Florida Water Management District, and the State of Florida. The refuge uses fish produced at the hatchery in wetland areas to help control mosquito populations in high-use areas on the refuge.
- The Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge used Fee Demo revenues to help purchase five remote controls for opening and closing solar-powered gates at the entrance to Brown Canyon; replace a water purification system at the captive breeding facility for the endangered masked bobwhite quail; acquire a new refuge entrance sign and other signs; and fund annual maintenance at the Environmental Education Center, the Ray Harm House (a visitor contact station with live-in volunteers) and La Casita, a cottage used by educators, nature writers, and photographers.
- At BLM's Painted Rocks Petroglyphs site, Fee Demo revenues helped resurface the access road, two camping loop roads, and 60 campsites. Sixty new picnic tables and fire rings were also purchased and installed.
- At BLM's Milner Historic/Recreation Area, Fee Demo revenues were used to replace all of the boat docks and improve access to the Snake River.
- Fee revenues allowed the USDA FS to provide more frequent, higher quality services and safer conditions than could be provided without Fee Demo revenues. Some typical examples include: maintaining 465 miles of trail on the Deschutes National Forest; replacing 8 picnic tables, 40 fire rings with grills, and 1 water tank on the Klamath National Forest; removing hazardous trees from Owl Creek horse trail on the National Forests of Alabama; extinguishing over 8,000 abandoned campfires and providing over

1,700 emergency assists to the public on the Enterprise Forests of Southern California (Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests).

- On the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests in Southern California, Fee Demo revenues have been used to increase the frequency of restroom cleaning. Prior to the Fee Demo Program, the nearly 1,000 toilet facilities were cleaned only once every 7-14 days. Fee Demo revenues now allow restrooms to be cleaned 4-15 times every week.
- The Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest used Fee Demo revenues to assist in completing construction of a new nature center in partnership with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Denver Botanic Gardens, and the Garden Club of Denver. The Forest also expanded and improved the quality of its interpretive programs, reaching over 27,000 visitors.

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